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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the purposes and effectiveness of faculty evaluation is presented. Topics of discussion include the purposes of faculty evaluation, the importance of clarity of purpose, and whether or not faculty evaluation results in more productive faculty. Ten guidelines for faculty evaluation programs are listed as follows: make sure the purpose of evaluation is clear; involve faculty in all aspects; make administrative commitment to the evaluation process go hand in hand with commitment to due process; attempt to balance institutional needs with individual faculty needs; link evaluation to faculty development and rewards; apply all evaluation procedures consistently and fairly; include multiple sources of faculty data in evaluation; bring evaluation policies and practices into conformity with established civil rights guidelines; when using existing programs, tailor them to meet local needs; and include several levels of review and appeal. Using guidelines in the evaluation process accomplishes three goals: they reopen the lines of communication between faculty and administration of faculty effectiveness; they help minimize faculty resistance to evaluation; and they permit an integration of evaluation into decision making and development processes on campuses. Contains 7 references. (SM)

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ERIC DIGEST

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Faculty Evaluation: Its Purposes and Effectiveness

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As institutional constraints and calls for increased accountability continue into the decade of the 1990s in colleges and universities, faculty evaluation programs need reexamining to see how they fit with institutional purposes of evaluation. An assessment of practices of evaluation also should help determine a program's effectiveness in promoting faculty development and productivity. To provide adequate and unbiased evaluation programs, administrators must involve faculty members in the process of determining the evaluation's purpose, as well as its scope, sources of data, participants, and assessment of effectiveness.

What Purpose, or Purposes, Should Faculty Evaluation Serve?

Faculty evaluation has been defined (Miller 1987) as either (1) a process designed to improve faculty performance (a development process), or (2) a procedure that assists in making personnel decisions (a reviewing process). Another particular concern has to do with evaluating the performance and vitality of tenured faculty members (Licata 1986). Vitality refers to the faculty member's ability and interest in continuing to grow. The author observes that this is an increasing phenomenon in light of the advancing ages of professors at most institutions and decreasing job mobility.

Disagreement in the literature centers on whether one evaluation program can serve both to improve performance and to help in personnel decisions. One contention (Seldin 1984) is that while both purposes are vital, they must be kept separate. The argument is that both purposes cannot be served by one system. On the other hand, Miller (1987) concedes that a dual system is ideal, but observes that limitations of time, money, and personnel render it impractical for most institutions. Nonetheless, Miller cautions, despite the need to find ways to improve faculty performance, institutions should not consider substituting one program that tries to combine both functions.

Why Is Clarity of Purpose Important?

Other research (Moomaw 1977) illustrates the need for clarifying the purpose, or purposes, of evaluation, especially for participants in the process. It was found that most faculty members perceived evaluation in different terms than administrators. Faculty saw evaluation as primarily in the service of making personnel decisions; most administrators considered evaluation primarily a faculty development process.

Such a lack of clarity about the purpose of evaluation often results in problems in communication and cooperation. To help fulfill both functions of evaluation, Centra (1977) suggests that faculty data should be collected from a wide variety of sources, including self-evaluations or self-reports, student ratings, colleague ratings, videotapes of classroom performace, and student achievement. These sources can help institutions make decisions on promotion, salary, or tenure, as well as assist in designing faculty development activities.

As emphasized by Seldin (1984), however, the cornerstone of any evaluation must be its purpose. The purpose of evaluation shapes the questions asked, the sources of data utilized, the depth of analysis, and the dissemination of findings.

Does Faculty Evaluation Result in More Productive Faculty?

Seldin further asserts that evaluation systems aimed at faculty development which provide constructive feedback to the professor often create a kind of dissatisfaction that motivates the professor to improve. Chances for faculty improvement increase when:

- immediate feedback is given,
- the professor wants to improve, and
- the professor knows how to bring about the improvement.

Although most institutions identify faculty improvement as their primary goal, Moomaw (1977) believes that most evaluation systems do not stimulate and support faculty development effectively. He cites the lack of connection between evaluation and development activities, and the absence of faculty involvement in the process of evaluation as the chief reasons for the uneven, or poor, effectiveness of programs at most institutions.

In assessing programs for evaluating teaching, McKeachie (1987) admits that the literature does not support the claim that instructional evaluation alone improves teaching. Faculty members often must be provided with an understanding of teaching and learning theories, as well as opportunities to develop and practice teaching skills in a nonthreatening environment. To be helpful in improving faculty performance, instructional evaluation must identify specific difficulties, not just assess the general quality of instruction.

What Are the Guidelines for Faculty Evaluation Programs?

A synthesis of the literature concerning faculty evaluation procedures offers the following general guidelines for establishing successful evaluation programs:

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1. Make sure the purpose of evaluation is clear. Tie all aspects of the process to the purpose.
2. Involve faculty in all aspects of evaluation.
3. Make administrative commitment to the evaluation process go hand in hand with commitment to due process, including written and published criteria for evaluation and appeal.
4. Attempt to balance institutional needs with individual faculty needs.
5. Link evaluation to faculty development and rewards. For instance, some institutions offer more liberal sabbaticals to professors agreeing to more frequent evaluation.
6. Apply all evaluation procedures consistently and fairly.
7. Include multiple sources of faculty data in evaluation.
8. Bring evaluation policies and practices into conformity with established civil rights guidelines.
9. When using existing programs (used successfully at other institutions), tailor them to meet local needs and traditions.
10. Include several levels of review and appeal.

In summary, using guidelines in the evaluation process accomplishes three goals:

- They reopen the lines of communication between faculty and administration on faculty effectiveness.
- They help minimize faculty resistance to evaluation.
- They permit an integration of evaluation into decision making and development processes on campus.

All three guidelines need to be incorporated in any faculty evaluation planning.

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